THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Surface-to-Surface Missile Prithvi (Army version), with a range of 150 km has been deployed by the Army. Production of Prithvi-II with a range of 250 km, has started after successful completion of development and flight testing. This version will go for deployment by the Army and Air Force. Production of Agni-I (with a range of 700 km) and Agni-II (with a range of 2000 km) have already started. They will be deployed during 2003. The other missiles are in various stages of development and flight testing.

Election to Cantonment Councils

†4819. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that election has not been conducted so far of the 62 cantonment, councils in the country after the tenure thereof had elapsed on February 2, 2002;

(b) if so, the reasons for the delay; and

(c) the fresh steps taken by Government to conduct election of all the cantonment councils as early as possible ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) and (b) Tenure of only 50 Cantonment Boards had expired during the year 2002 which were extended for a further period of one year. Thereafter, the constitution of these Boards were varied for one more year under Section 14 of the Cantonments Act, 1924. Election to another Cantonment Board, Badami Bagh has not been possible due to law and order situation prevailing there. The term of the remaining Boards has not yet expired.

(c) In view of the exercise undertaken for bringing a New Cantonment Act, it has been decided to hold elections soon after its enactment.

High Court order on Relief to a Disabled Pilot

4820. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi has directed the Indian Air Force to give permanent commission and an alternate job to a pilot who was disabled during a rescue operation;

(b) if so, the details of the case in which the directive was issued by the Hon'ble High Court; and

(c) whether any follow-up action has been taken with regard thereto and if so, the details thereof ?

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†Original notice of the question was received ih Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The officer was considered for grant of Permanent Commission (PC) in 2001. Since he did not fulfill the minimum performance criteria for grant of PC, an order was issued for his release from service with effect from 20-02-2003, on completion of tenure of Short Service Commission. The officer challenged the release order in Delhi High Court alleging he was denied PC on account of an injury sustained in an aircraft accident. The High Court directed the Air Force to grant PC to the petitioner. Accordingly, the release order was cancelled on 18-02-2003 and the officer is continuing in service.

The Judgement is being studied in consultation with the Ministry of Law for further appropriate action.

Unidentified Aircraft

4821. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state.

(a) whether an unidentified aircraft was sighted 180 nautical miles off Chennai on 3rd February, 2003;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) what follow up action has been taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Modernisaton of Army

4822. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Army would focus on a modernisation plan;

(b) if so, the details thereof ;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Indian commandos have suffered due to ad-hoc policies of Government :

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) how would Government equip the Indian commandos to face the threat scenario during post 9/11?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) Modernisation of the defence forces, including the Army is an ongoing process keeping in view the security imperatives and threat perceptions. Some of the thrust areas of modernization of Army during the 10th plan are (i) upgradation of major combat systems of Armour, Artillery, Mechanised Infantry; (ii) improve